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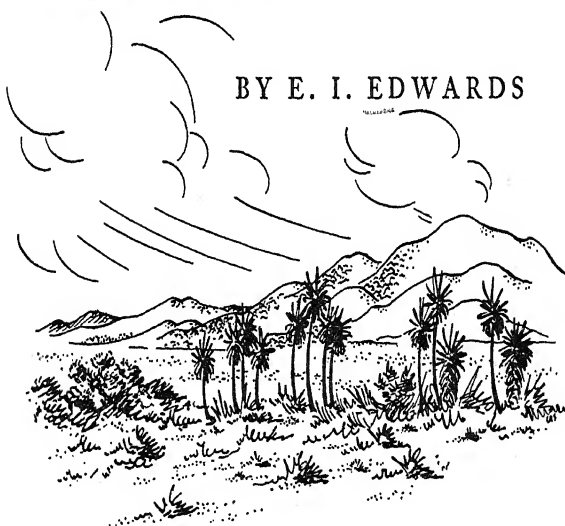


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Desert Yarns

Desert Yarns

BY E. I. EDWARDS



THE WARD RITCHIE PRESS • LOS ANGELES

1946

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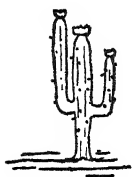
By E. I. EDWARDS

Printed in the United States of America

To my good friend FRANK WILLIAMS
Companion on desert trails and Sierra pathways
I dedicate these Yarns

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A Word about These Desert Yarns

THE YARNS in this book are mainly of desert trails and desert people. Yet they reveal no characteristic of life that is not also to be found along *any* trail, anywhere. It is just because the air is clearer on the desert—and we see farther. The tempo of living is relaxed—and we find time to know one another. Every roadway pulsates with human drama—drama richly spiced with all those fine elements of comedy, romance and tragedy which are woven so closely into the pattern of life's fabric.

And always the roadway is vibrant with the perpetual challenge of the desert—its beauty and color, its immeasurable vastness, its penetrant silence. Always our own weighty problems seem to lose themselves into the ever-renewing distances that spread around and beyond us. After all, it is only as we permit our difficulties to become *subjective* that we fail to gauge their relative significance. On the desert we learn to view problems *objectively*, and thus the more accurately appraise them.

Every one owes it to himself, now and then, to seek sanctuary in the desert. Out in these wide, open spaces

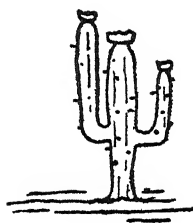
one finds room to isolate himself, to extend his mental horizons, to absorb into his being the harmony of softened desert colors.

When the Psalmist exclaims—"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength," the inference is not that his strength stems altogether and in a universal sense from the hills. A more reasonable implication is that this influx of strength derives from the sublime act of *lifting up his eyes*.—"I will lift up mine eyes . . . from whence cometh my strength."

And so it is, out on the desert, that one may—in actual fact—*lift up his eyes* and behold the glorious wasteland spread itself into illimitable space, even unto the distant hills. If he be athirst, he may drink freely of its water. If he be an hungered, he may partake of its nourishment. If he be blinded, he may regain his vision and behold the desert to blossom as the rose.

These yarns are all real; they tell of some fugitive adventure—some typical desert experience—that occurred on the wide stretches of the great Mohave, along the road that leads to Death Valley. And a few of them—perhaps *most* of them—tell of the region in and around our "beloved desert," out at Twentynine Palms, and of the really fine desert folks who dwell there.

Desert Yarns



*This Being the Yarn
about the Man Who Towed
Me into a Gas Station*

I SUPPOSE it happens to all of us, one time or another. Anyway, it happened to me. I ran out of gas. And at such a place, and at such a time! Away out in the wilderness it was, and in the dead of night. It's a queer sensation one experiences when he finds himself in this predicament. He feels as if he didn't have a friend in all the world. Not only this. Everyone speeds past him as though he were the number one enemy of the entire public.

At any rate, that's the way it seemed to me. There I sat, as lonesome as a night owl in the day-time. A thousand cars, more or less, passed back and forth while I sat there. Some of them honked tauntingly at me, as though to suggest that I pull off the highway and roll down the embankment, or something.

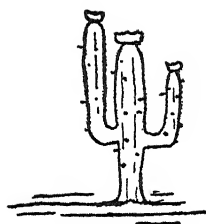
Well, I had just about decided to call it a night and prepare to get a little sleep, when finally a car came to a stop behind me. The driver approached. A gruff old rascal he was. I had a peculiarly guilty feeling when I faced him; and I started to apologize for running out of gas. But he laughed and, while he was laughing, fastened a tow cable on my car. Then he drove his

own car in front of mine, hooked on the cable, and off we started.

It was then, while being towed along, that I began to think about things. It all appeared too easy. The good Neighbor was a bit *too* willing to help me. I began to have visions of a huge tow charge, and all that sort of thing. For the miles were many that night. These desert towns spread far apart and the little roadside gas stations fold up each night with the chickens.

I became so concerned with the thought of the bill I'd have to pay that I was actually sorry to see the lights of the town gleam in the darkness of that desert night. For by this time I'd figured it all out that the old boy made a business of just this sort of thing; that he drove up and down these desert roads looking for some poor unfortunate who was out of gas and had to be towed to the nearest town.

Then the fatal moment came. I couldn't force my voice beyond a parched whisper when I asked him how much I owed. (I had already decided that, if his bill was too high, I'd tell him just to keep the car.) Well, he looked at me; and I can still hear the boom of his hearty laugh as he replied—"My charge, Neighbor? Why, all I want you to do is to promise me you'll help the other fellow if ever you find him in trouble along the roadside."—So I thanked him; and shook his hand. And I gave him my solemn promise.



*This Being the Yarn
about the Man Who
Got Stuck in the Sand*

NO DOUBT you've all done as I did that day—got stuck in the sand. Or maybe the mud. It's much the same thing. It means you'll have to find some one to dig you out; that is, if you get stuck so deep you can't dig yourself out, or don't have a shovel, or a block and tackle, or something.

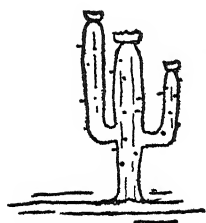
On that late summer's evening, the road I traveled crossed a sandy wash—and suddenly the wheels began to lose traction. I started to turn around; saw I couldn't make it; stopped; tried to back up; and then I stuck.

But this isn't the reason for my story. The point of my yarn is to be found in what the Neighbor said to me—the Neighbor who very graciously pulled me out for a meager donation of \$10.00.

Anyway, while he was digging me out he preached a little sermon on the ethics of driving a car through the sand. And he quoted something from Tennyson, or Shakespeare, or the Bible—or maybe it was Emerson, to the effect that “in skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed.” Said if I'd just kept going I would have made it all right. The trouble was, I had stopped. And he showed me where, less than three

feet ahead, the sand had hardened again. But the minute I stopped, I was sunk. Or rather my four wheels were sunk, which amounts to the same thing.

And so I suppose the lesson was worth the ten dollars, one way or another. For if ever I get into sand or mud again, I'll keep sludgin' away as long as the wheels will turn. The more I see of trouble the more I'm convinced the best way to get out of it is to wade right on through in the hope of reaching the high spots again. It's when a man stops, and tries to back out, that he generally gets stuck. And whether this philosophy is right or whether it's wrong, it cost me ten bucks and a lot of inconvenience to find it out. So I'm passing it on for what it's worth.



*This Being the Yarn
about the Man Whose
House Burned Down*

HERE AWHILE back we were driving home from the distant city. It was late in the night time and a desert wind was blowing strong.

For many miles we could see it—a mad splash of fire in the distance, lighting the darkness of the desert night. A house and service station on the lonesome highway; a man's home and business being reduced to ash-bits in the dead of night.

A pathetic thing it was. A sad and tragic thing. And all we could do was sit idly by and watch it burn. Watch all the Neighbor had in the whole wide world melt away into dying embers.

As we started on our way, one member of the party remarked, "I dare say that man will build again on the ashes."

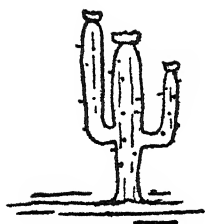
And I like to think that our friend was right. These desert pioneers have a habit of building again on ashes. The fire of misfortune may take away every material thing they possess, but it cannot burn from their eternal souls that urge to go forward and build anew.

"Build again on the ashes." There is something noble in this thought that should fasten deep into the

heart. Something that should clamor relentlessly for us to crawl to our knees, when we are beaten down, and come up fighting.

I hope this man out on the desert highway will build again. I hope he will not look at those glowing embers and see in them the dying gleam of his best-laid plans. I hope he will level off that heap of smoldering ashes and build anew with the coming light of day.

And maybe next time he will lay a better foundation, and make his walls a little more secure, and put in an extra gas pump, and paint himself a new sign. Chicago was built again on ashes. So was San Francisco. And so has many a great man built himself into usefulness upon the ashes of some burned-out past.



*This Being the Yarn
about the Man Who
Became a Devil*

I KNOW a man who is about the best natured fellow I've ever met. He's a kindly man and the very essence of courtesy and good manners. I've seen him step gallantly aside to let another pass; I've never once known him to fail, when acknowledging a greeting from a lady, to remove his hat.

Yes, and more. He is prodigal of social etiquette. There are times when his voice fairly rings with a sincere, cordial, and apologetic—"I *beg* your pardon. I am *so* sorry." And he means it, too. No veneer in his make-up. When he says "I thank you *so* much," he is really thanking you. Never have I known one to be more sincere and genuine in his social conduct.

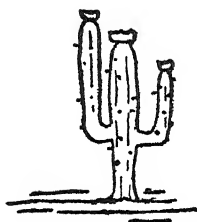
But here awhile back he invited me to ride with him over a stretch of desert road. What a day that turned out to be. Never in all my life have I seen such a decided transformation. The very minute his hands grasped that steering wheel he was a changed man. No longer was he the mild, even-tempered individual I had always known. No longer was he the fair flower of courtesy and gentle manners. Instead, he became like a man possessed. That grip on his steering wheel

transformed him into a raving maniac. From an even-tempered, good-natured individual he became, of a sudden, a maddened demon of the road, giving quarter to no man. Even his eyes had a murderous glint and the tone of his voice bespoke disaster.

It all started when he came up behind a woman driver and couldn't pass her. For a solid half hour I sat there, being cussed with all the choice cuss words that ever graced a vocabulary. I say *I* was cussed; the woman couldn't hear him.

If he didn't actually *see* something wrong, he *invented* a fault. Every motorist he passed on that highway was "one helluva driver." "The whole damn regiment" of drivers was out of step with my friend. Even the slightest irregularity annoyed him; positively enraged him. And I sat beside him, reaping the full and undivided harvest of his tirades; for I was the only one who could hear him.

Finally we reached our destination. Just after he parked his car and stepped out on the crowded sidewalk, a woman accidentally brushed against him. Instantly my friend was all apologies. Hat in hand, he bowed politely and very earnestly remarked—"I *beg* your pardon. I am *so* sorry."



*This Being the Yarn
about the Man Who Almost
Ran out of Gas*

A NEIGHBOR of the Highway told me the story of the time when he had found it necessary to make a long drive over a lonesome stretch of desert road. Now it so happened that no gas stations were scattered over this trail he had to travel. And he knew all about this before he ventured forth on his trip.

But he looked down at his faithful old gas gauge and he figured he had just about enough gas in his tank to make a go of it. So he slipped his car into gear and slid confidently along the road where there were no gas stations.

Then the shadows of evening crept over the land and he knew it would soon be night. And with the thought of coming darkness he began to worry about his supply of gas. The grip of that old familiar fear fastened upon him—the fear that he might not have enough gas to bring him safely to his journey's end.

And the farther he traveled the more he worried about it. The moon came out and shone brightly upon the sands of the desert, and the cool breeze of evening swept over the land. The stars hung low—like

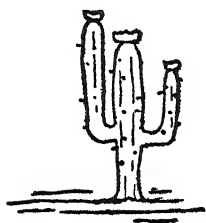
silvered lamps, and the blue of the sky was deep and serene.

But our Neighbor of the Highway did not see the moon. For him there were no desert stars. The cool breeze of evening could not fan the heat of worry from his brow. He could think of only one thing—his gas; would he have enough gas to carry him through. And every moment he expected his motor to miss and sputter and die.

Oh yes, he made it all right. But that's not the point. His whole journey was ruined—the beauty of the desert, the joy of the open road. And all because he hadn't started out with just a little more gas than he actually needed.

That's the idea. The idea of building up a reserve. I suppose we are all of us traveling along some stretch of open road—somewhere, some place. The road may lead us through the desert; it may stretch along some wooded seashore. It may be the road we travel every day to our desks; to the machine we operate in the plant; to the scaffolding where we drive our nails.

But wherever it leads, the journey will be the more pleasant and we'll feel a bit more secure if we travel along with just a little something in reserve. A little more preparation than the job actually demands. A little more cash in our pockets. A little more common sense. A little more gas in the tank.



This Being the Yarn

about the Old Doctor

THE MOST fascinating yarn ever told me of the Open Road is the story of the Old Doctor who ministered unto his Neighbors in the high mountain country of central Idaho.

Where the Big Lost River winds its way among the pine trees and finally loses itself in the remoteness of its mountain solitude—it was there the Doctor lived and labored in his beautiful ministry of service. He had come as a young man just out of College; and his was the old, old story of those self-sacrificing heroes who—like the Great Physician of Galilee—go about doing good along the by-roads of life, where songs of glory never sound and words of praise remain unspoken.

And, sharing honors with the Doctor, was his horse—the faithful companion that had served with him down through the years. Together they lived in their memories of glad spring days, of lonely rides in the stillness of winter, of hurried journeys over wilderness roads, of endless nights in the fight against death. Often—ever so often—in the early hours of morning, the Doctor and his horse would be seen moving along

the road toward home—the Doctor asleep in the buggy; the horse pulling him safely to his journey's end.

The Doctor frequently remarked to the Neighbors that he really had but one wish in life. He had seen so much of suffering that he hoped, when the end came, he might go suddenly, and—in the going—some way know that he would suffer no pain. And he said if he could only be sure of this in advance, he would guarantee that the Neighbors would find a smile on his lips when the time arrived for him to go.

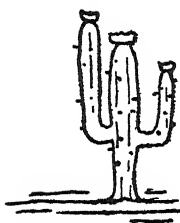
Came a day, at last, when the horse could no longer travel the mountain trails; when he grew too old to share the long night rides with the Doctor on their ceaseless errands of mercy. And so it was that an automobile finally replaced the horse. . . . And thus the weeks passed by.

In the early hours of one crisp winter's morning, a Neighbor was traveling a mountain road where the cliffs were steep and the turns were sudden and sharp. And there, ahead of him, he saw the Doctor driving slowly homeward from a mercy call that had carried him out—far into the night. It was twilight time of the morning. A short distance ahead of them the road turned sharply. Below—hundreds of feet below—roared the Big Lost River as it tumbled over its rocky bed.

But the Doctor did not make the turn. He drove on—straight into the cold, grey dawn of that Idaho morning. Perhaps the tired old soul had forgotten that

his faithful horse was no longer with him. He had fallen asleep—as so often he had done in the days gone by.

They said that when they found him there was an expression of infinite calm upon his face. They remembered, then, his telling them that he desired to go quickly and without pain. They knew that his wish had been granted; and that some way, some how, he must have known it in advance. For he had passed on to his great reward—and a smile was upon his lips.



This Being the Yarn

That is Too Awful to Tell

I HAD INTENDED never to touch upon the subject of safety in these yarns, but I feel it would be an unpardonable omission if at least one article was not devoted to a frank, candid discussion concerning this specter of rolling death that incessantly stalks our highways. And so this yarn will be straight to the point; sordid, tragic, revolting. But the story I tell is true; and I believe it is time for many of us to face this truth.

My telephone rang. Another wreck in the canyon. An overturned car. A woman trapped in a raging inferno, horribly burning to death. The car still blazing when we arrived. An object pinned on the floor, glowing red against the red glare of the flames. We turn our fire extinguisher on it. The glowing red turns to a dirty black. We attempt to remove it from the flaming car. A steel crossbeam, on what was once the roof, blocks our progress.

We pry at this thing—this blackened thing, this body thing. We pry it up and around the steel beam. It rolls out on the ground. Two charred holes stare dully at us. A ghastly gap that once was a mouth now

seems fairly to shriek at us—"You and you and you! Look at me! Look well at me! A few scant moments ago I was flesh and blood—buoyantly alive, like you. Look at me closely, intently. Look well into these charred and smoldering eyes of mine. Do I remind you of someone? Your mother, perhaps; some other loved one, near and dear to you. Or maybe you see your own image featured here. Maybe you see how you may look. Next week. Tomorrow. Today."

God! The thing is sickening. Awful. It bursts into flames again. We rush a can of water from a nearby truck and dash them out. We grope into the burning car once more for pieces that we didn't recover at first. Comes now the stench of burning flesh, human flesh. It sears eternally into our nostrils. The smoke of crumbling bones settles ever-lastingly into our lungs.

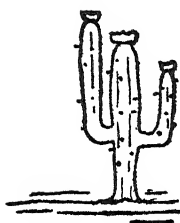
A young chap—strong, husky, returning on leave of absence to the city, stops his car and rushes over. Instinctively he throws his hands in front of his face as though he would ward off a blow. He rushes to his car, shouting wildly, "I'm going back—away from it all. Away from this damned desert and this road of death."

Ah yes! This "Road of Death." How truly did he speak. Only a short distance in either direction from where we stood, I have seen dark splotches on the pavement. For thirty miles this Road of Death is recurrently blotched with the blood of those we knew. Close friends, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, chil-

dren—are being butchered on this Death Road. Every curve on this bleeding highway, every hump in its stretch of pavement, is either an actual or a potential harbinger of death—cruel, hideous death. Not because the road itself is dangerous. Not that. It is the human element that travels on the road—any road.

We left the car there on the rocks where we found it. Someone suggested it be left there for all time, a grim reminder that what once had happened could happen again. I remember the reply of our Sheriff. He had been through this thing many times before, but I thought his voice trembled a bit as he spoke: “Yes, they may see the car; but they will never see this pathetic thing we are carrying away.”

No. They never will. But one day they may see something just as odious, just as ghastly; something that once was dear and precious—staring sadly at them, mocking them, with cold, unseeing eyes.



This Being the Yarn

about the "Dipodomys Man"

OUT ON the beautiful desert at Twentynine Palms lives my good friend "Ketch"—the "Dipodomys Man." Nearly twenty years ago "Ketch" came to the desert. Only the Oasis, where stands the remnant of the original twenty-nine palm trees, was there in that early day; only the Oasis and a few desert shacks.

But a few desert shacks were too many for "Ketch." With the whole desert to choose from, he withdrew into its very heart; and there he homesteaded a quarter section. Shortly thereafter, because he feared even such an assured privacy might one day be encroached upon, he acquired an adjoining hundred and sixty acres; and he pitched his tent in the geographical center of the entire half-section spread.

Well, the years have brought many changes to Twentynine Palms. But the early choice of the "Dipodomys Man" has been abundantly vindicated. He is near, but not *too* near, the business district; and he continues to reign supreme in the center of his half square mile of desert glory. For in whatever direction he may turn he is greeted by miles of restful desert,

with mountains of ever-changing color drawn in a far-distant circle about him. No hillside is at his back; no man-made structure impedes his view. His horizon is circular and stretches far away over illimitable desert spaces.

As "Ketch" explains it, his land may be valueless, but his space is priceless. His space and his view. There is no better view in all of Twentynine Palms than that which "Ketch" looks out upon from his cabin at the Rancho Dipodomys.

But what is the meaning of "Rancho Dipodomys," and why the "Dipodomys Man"? The yarn is a fascinating one. "Ketch" had pitched his tent, years ago, out on that lonely desert homestead; and he had sat down, at twilight time, to enjoy his first evening as Over-Lord of this vast domain.

Suddenly he observed little grayish-white animals come bouncing toward him over the sand. They scampered about at his feet, clearly indicating that they were accepting—without question—his presence in their homeland. He tossed wheat to them and watched, as they busily gathered it into their tiny cheek pouches. He recognized them now as Dipodomys—the energetic little Kangaroo Rat of the desert.

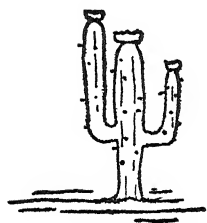
And so they proceeded to make friends with him, even eating out of his hand. Well, "Ketch" and his Dipsos have been friends ever since and this friendship has proven as profitable as it has been interesting. That night on the desert, twenty years ago, marked the beginning of his close and intimate observance of these

singular little animals. Today he is a recognized authority on the *Dipodomys Deserti Deserti* and the *Dipodomys Merriami Merriami*.

Neighbors became interested and dropped in of evenings to see him feed his Dipos. Strangers heard, and came from faraway places to his desert home. The little tent was enlarged to a sizeable cabin. The desert spread became the "Rancho Dipodomys"—a guest ranch for those who longed for the peace and quiet of the desert, and the unique experience of feeding the Dipodomys. Magazines invited "Ketch" to contribute articles descriptive of his extraordinary little desert friends and their captivating habits. Cabin space was enlarged again and yet again.

And so it was, here awhile back, that I—in turn—heard of the "Dipodomys Man" and journeyed far to his Rancho. And, while there, I breathed in the healing air of his wonderful desert; I fed his Dipodomys; I listened to the fine philosophy of this cultured desert man.

And I thought how, in life, it is good to encourage some type of special interest. We should all of us, after a fashion, become Dipodomys Men. We should find something along the way to draw us outside of ourselves and our personally-conceived problems into the more useful consideration of the problems of others. In such a manner will life itself take on an added luster; even as the problems of the little Dipodomys drove away the loneliness of many a desert night—and made a philosopher of my good friend "Ketch."



*This Being the Yarn
about the "Wee Hoosie"*

PERHAPS this yarn has more to do with my good friend the Scotch Doctor than it does with his bonnie "Wee Hoosie" out on the isolated stretches of our beloved desert. I am not sure; nor does it really matter, for the Doctor and his "Wee Hoosie" are each so much a part of the other that we find no point in attempting to separate them.

Now the Scotch Doctor of whom I write is not the good physician who sits at his big desk in the noisy City. The Scotch Doctor of my yarn is this same physician who, as he approaches the vast open spaces of his desert, becomes greatly uplifted—immediately transcending the role of City Doctor by taking unto himself the glorified essence of Laird o' the "Wee Hoosie."

It all happened here awhile back when the City physician invited me to be his guest and share with him the peace and quiet of his desert solitude.

Perched upon a pleasant slope, commanding an unimpaired view of perfect desert landscape, stood the "Wee Hoosie." That it was the "Wee Hoosie" there could be no doubt. The cabin was as tiny as it was

inviting and as compact as it was cozy. And conspicuously posted at its entrance was the neatly-lettered sign—"Wee Hoosie."

Now it must be explained to those who know not desert places that a part of the glory of desert living abides in its essential primitive nature. The desert is a rugged place; to be in harmony with this ruggedness is to abandon certain conveniences of civilization. Thus a desert cabin is not truly in keeping with desert tradition if it be unduly burdened with a surplusage of plumbing. There must be in evidence the tiny house in the rear, standing proudly as a symbol of a forgotten age, or a lost art, or something.

In any event, the "Wee Hoosie" had sacrificed not one particle of its rugged individualism. But only to my friend the Scotch Doctor could have come the unique inspiration to name this smaller edifice the "Wee Wee Hoosie."

I need not elaborate upon the furnishings of the "Wee Hoosie"; how, even to the remotest detail, it was perfectly appointed. As we entered, it became vibrant with the presence of the Scotch Doctor. His personality was everywhere radiated—in the well-chosen books on the side shelves, in the pictures adorning the walls, in the studied placement of furniture, in the ingeniously devised cabinets, in the fine achievement of cleverly-utilized space.

The very first duty the Doctor attended to, after unbarring the doors and the windows, was to run up the American flag. "And noo," says he, "the desert

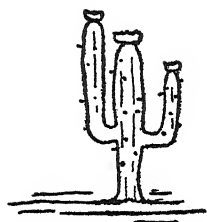
will know the Maister of the Hoose has come."

Weeks later I was in the desert for a second time. The Scotch Doctor had not yet arrived. Irrespective of this, I was eager for another look at his charming "Wee Hoosie."

And so it was that I drove a space of miles to see it—that "tiny bit cabin" on the slope of a desert hill. Its doors and windows were barred and shuttered, its patio gates were nailed fast, its colors were not flying in the soft desert breeze. The "Wee Hoosie" was only an inanimate object perched lonely and forlorn upon a barren hill.

And I thought how like it is in life. When a man stands alone, deprived of love, abandoned by faith, shorn of ideals—well, he is no longer like unto that brave "Wee Hoosie" I once had known; he is just a desolate object, clinging hard to the slope of a wind-swept plain.

But for the "Wee Hoosie," at least, a joyous awakening seemed assured. Soon the Maister would return, the shutters would be removed from doors and windows, the patio gates would open wide, the flag would be unfurled. The "Wee Hoosie" would once more surge with life—the tiniest, coziest, *bonniest* Hoose in all the desert land.



*This Being the Yarn
about the Oasis of Mara*

OUT ON a vast, windswept desert abides the ancient and picturesque Oasis of Mara—the Oasis of the twenty-nine palms. There are no longer twenty-nine palms; perhaps there never were that many—certainly not within the memory of white men. The Indians referred to it in this fashion, and quite plausibly there is some factual as well as traditional basis for their reference.

It is not easy to determine just how many of the original twenty-nine palms remain—a dozen living, perhaps; a prostrate trunk of one old patriarch lying where it fell, ages ago; the dead trunk of another, standing upright; an ancient stump of yet another, still firmly imbedded in the ground.

Now the appearance of *Washingtonia* palms on a desert is not an uncommon sight, yet it is ever a novel and a welcome one. There are, in fact, other groups of palms not far from Mara; but these are hidden in obscure canyons and none is easily accessible. The glory of Mara is chiefly in the fascination of its location. Said to be the most northerly group of these palms, it is of singular and striking beauty in its splendid isolation out on the open face of the desert. It is

visible for miles; and from time immemorial the weary, thirsty wanderer has beheld these venerable and stately palm trees with a surge of gladness and relief. Geologically, a fault underneath the earth's surface blocks the natural drainage from the mountains in the South; and the imprisoned water is thus forced upward, creating this oasis of beauty in the heart of a rugged, barren land.

And thus it was, after a space of time, that I first came into this desert; came, as most everyone does come, to see the queenly Oasis. Little did I care for the Village, nor was I primarily interested in the desert itself. I quite naturally envisioned a settlement that clustered around these ancient palm trees; so it was with something of a shock that I found the poor little Oasis relegated a mile away from the Village—like a sort of forsaken appendage which, because of its extreme old age, was grudgingly permitted to clutter up a portion of the landscape.

But if I suffered a shock by noting its ostracization, I experienced utter disillusionment when I beheld the deplorable condition of the Oasis itself. Weeds, grass, garbage and debris contaminated it. The tiny little lake in its bosom that might have reflected rare beauty, was and still is but a revolting receptacle for rubbish. If one had endeavored with a studied, precision-like effort to create an abandoned and uninviting derelict, he could not better have succeeded. The desolate desert that surrounds it is, by contrast, a veritable Garden of Eden.

Even the old adobe house which stands there, itself so replete with romantic appeal and historic association, is in ruins. A lonely little grave, dating from a period long gone by, is still a very lonely little grave. It could be hallowed into something of a shrine. Only the illimitable stretches of the desert itself preserve the glory of Mara. Distance lends romance and charm. Nature is striving desperately to sustain the pure beauty of her rare creation, and smooth over the depredations of man.

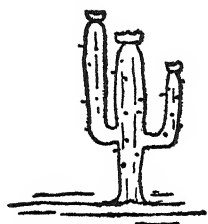
And yet, as I came more often into the desert, I ceased to concern myself over the Oasis. That which really brought me there in the beginning was no longer a tradition in my heart. It was subordinated to the drab commonplace. It became merely a cluster of palm trees—very ordinary palm trees, in fact, and I seldom wasted a glance in their direction.

How easy it is, in life, to accept things as they are—people and things. Constant association often dims the freshness of an initial appeal. The charm of a lovely song may become dimmed when we know too well the singer. The luster of some exquisite creation loses brilliance when its creator is seen too often in our midst. The love of a sweet personality is oftentimes permitted to fade even the while its glory is steadily illuminating our lives.

But here awhile back friends came with me from the noisy City—came for the first time upon our desert. And from them there sounded again the old, old query—"Where is the Oasis?" For, after all, it was

this they wished mainly to see. It was not the town, for they had come from a *City*; it was not the people, for they had left a *multitude*; it was not the desert at Twentynine Palms, for they had already journeyed through *sixty miles* of desert to get there. They had come to see the Oasis of Mara. They wanted just to stand there in sterile desert country and look upon that which is truly our heritage and which should be our most cherished possession. They came as pilgrims to our life-sustaining Palladium.

Some day, perhaps, when other strangers come into our midst, they will see *first of all* a beautiful natural park which shall be unto them and unto all of us the pride of our desert. And about it shall cluster a village and a people who may well be proud to claim even a portion of the reflected glory of Mara.



This Being the Yarn about Desert Folks

I DON'T think people who live on the desert are any better than the rest of us nor, for that matter, any different. The reason they perhaps *seem* better and *appear* different is because they have discovered the secret of taking time out just to be *themselves*.

You can't very well hurry, out on the desert. Life isn't geared to the high tempo of the world of business. In desert country there isn't any place in particular to go; therefore you are not in any hurry about getting there. And the reason there isn't any place to go is because you know you are already in about the best place you can possibly be, so why go any where else?

In the City you begin to wonder what is behind the next big building, or what lies just around the corner of the street a block away. So you become restless, and every other spot seems a little more exciting than the one you're standing on.

But in our desert you need only stand where you are, really to enjoy life; for from where you stand you can see everything there is to see in these vast stretches

of God's quiet land. And, as you stand there, you can breathe in the desert's clean, large air, and bathe your soul in the beauty of its ever-changing colors.

The desert relaxes first the mind, then—as a matter of course—the body. There is no tension, no strain, no compulsion. The desert is quiet; even the animals move noiselessly over its surface. And, in the distance, the mountains are peaceful and still.

My friend Ketch, over on the Rancho Dipodomys, tells me he can't make City folks understand how he occupies his time. "What did you do today?" someone asks him. "Well," Ketch replies, "this morning I tidied up a bit around the place, and right after lunch I went down to the store."—"But surely it didn't require the entire afternoon just to go down to the store?" "No," Ketch explains, "perhaps not; but while I was there I stopped for the mail, and passed the time of day with a friend or two. And *that*," he concludes triumphantly, "*that* made an afternoon of it."

Out on the desert, quite far out on the desert, lives my literary friend and her two marvelous dogs. The day she told me about stepping on the rattlesnake, and of her experience with the tarantula, and how the coyotes circled her house at night for their nocturnal serenades, I became apprehensive. But when she informed me that, on summer evenings, she dragged her cot out on the desert in front of her house and *slept* there, I could not refrain from voicing that trite old query—"But aren't you frightened at times?" And she replied, as only this charming desert woman *could*

reply to such an impertinent and ridiculous question, "Well, I suppose I might be; but you know, it is so peaceful and lovely out there that I immediately fall asleep; and then, of course, there is no opportunity to become frightened."

And the good Neighbors who live in their big brick house on the hill, and look down upon my newly-acquired spread in the valley below, so very graciously explained to me—"You see, we each have such interesting views. It is as though *we* live on a mountain and look down on lake and valley below. And *you*, from your beautiful desert floor, can look out and upward to the mountains in the distance." . . . Only desert folks would have spoken so kindly and with such sure understanding. Their keen discernment, no doubt, had warned them that I—having only just recently come into their midst and made choice of their land—stood ready and eager to exhibit poor taste in arguing the merits of *my* location in preference to the hillside view *they* had chosen.

"You don't barge up to a desert man's door and start knocking," explains our beloved Scotch Doctor. "You park your car a polite distance from his house and sound your horn. Then you await his coming, allowing him ample time to complete whatever he may be doing. This is desert courtesy and is part of our desert code."

It is that—and more. Infinitely more. It is a part of the great scheme of desert relaxation, wherein no man is himself in a hurry and wherein everyone extends

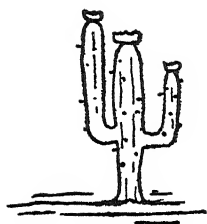
the same privilege of leisurely movement to his fellows.

Desert folks have a pronounced sense of values, too. They have implicit faith in the future of their land. "Selling any land at this time at any price but potential would be sacrificial," writes one native to me. So, practical reasoners that they are, they transcend all interim price standards, assigning tentative and nebulous *future* values to their immediate appraisals. The post-war boom in metropolitan areas has nothing on desert real estate. Every true son of the desert envisions another Palm Springs glorifying his particular front yard.

The city man smiles at this; because all his untrained eye can behold is mile upon mile of trackless desert waste where nothing much can grow except lizards and creosote, and very little creosote. Yet, as he smiles, he usually buys at the exorbitant figure demanded. And he wonders just what he is buying at these Seventh and Broadway prices.

But deep down in his heart he *knows* what he is buying. And it's not what the desert man is apt to think, either. The chap from the City understands that the dead, desolate sand heap he has just acquired at avocado and citrus grove figures is not worth a plugged nickel to him or to anyone else (except the Neighbor who just sold it). But he perceives a hidden worth that has perhaps not been reckoned on by the desert man in formulating his inflated price structure. No cost is too great when it results in the acquisition of peace and contentment, of quiet and rest, of

strength for the body and communion with God. For these priceless treasures—and for the glory of the sunset, the hugeness of a desert night with its brilliance of low-hung stars, the thrill of awakening to a desert sunrise—for all these the City man can well afford to pay his desert Neighbor the price he asks, even consenting to accept, in the deal, a spread of sterile, wind-swept desert sand.



This Being the Yarn

about the Wrong Road

I SUPPOSE all of us, at one time or another, have paused to wonder just what might have happened had we chosen some other highway in life—some other road that stretched outward in another direction from the one we elected to travel. And no doubt there come times when we feel we have chosen the wrong road; that we could have gone farther and seen better country and achieved a nobler purpose had we only gone the *other* way.

Out on our beloved desert of Mara, one day, I was driving along a trail that led into a distant mountain canyon. I was searching for an abandoned mine in the depth of this remote and rugged wilderness. Of a sudden, I knew I had chosen the wrong road; that my deserted mine was not to be found along this particular trail.

Then I chanced to look about me. Through a break in the canyon wall I could see our incomparable desert in all its majestic beauty of expression. Never had I known it to be so rich in color; so utterly peaceful and so dreamily silent in its impressive sublimity. And—far away in the distance—I saw the tranquil palms of

Mara reposing in their close and confiding communion with the desert. At no other time had I seen the Oasis as it appeared at this moment. From my vantage point in the canyon I saw those venerable palms as I had never seen them before—saw them with a surge of triumphant exhilaration. It was nearing evening time. Already a gorgeous display of rainbow-hued brilliance was flaming in the West. The Oasis was saturated with a deepening riot of changing color that etched vividly these age-old palm trees into the glowing red of the western sky.

Then, as I looked upon the glory of this ancient desert and upon the pure beauty of its heritage of palm trees, I thought how—after all—the road I had traveled may *not* have been the wrong one. Although it had failed to bring me to the scene of my first objective, yet perhaps it had brought me to something even better and finer and lovelier. And the road itself had been pleasant to travel upon.

It was somewhat like this with our old friend Columbus, I suppose. He set out to discover a shorter route to the Indies. He took the wrong road—and failed. That is, he failed to find the East Indies. But he achieved that which was far more to be desired. He found America.

And so in life, even as on the desert, it is at least sporting to make the most of the road we are on. Chances are it's a pretty fair sort of a road to travel; and it may lead us, at last, into a country glorious—even unto our desired haven. Who knows? After all,

it's not the road—but the manner in which we travel it. It's not the distant goal we strive for—but the spirit in which we seek that goal. For the only real goal we attain in life is the one we carry within our hearts as we journey along the trail. Thus, when night overtakes us, it matters not so much how far we traveled during the day nor along what path or highway. The urgent question is always—*did we make the trip worth while; did we travel our road bravely and well.*

So often it is the *other* road, the *wrong* road, the road we hadn't planned on, that leads us to our greatest achievements and to our fondest joys. Too frequently a preconceived goal becomes for us a fixation—a tremendous necessity. But the goal is *not* the journey. And only the journey is worth while—only the journey along some pleasant roadway, with the wild air pounding vigorously against us; and the glad thrill of every living, growing thing enhanced to tonic proportions.

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